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AMENDMENT RECOMMENDED TO THE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION FOR THE SAFETY OF LIFE AT SEA

FRIDAY, JULY 26, 1957.—Ordered to be printed

Mr. GREEN, from the Committee on Foreign Relations, submitted the following

REPORT

[To accompany Executive M, Eighty-fifth Congress, first session]

The Committee on Foreign Relations, having had under consideration the amendment to the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, recommend that the Senate give its advice and consent to ratification thereof.

PURPOSE OF THE AMENDMENT

The purpose of the proposed amendment to the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea is to remove from the convention a prohibition against the use of inflatable liferafts on merchant and passenger vessels in international carriage.

COMMITTEE ACTION

The proposed amendment to the International Convention was recommended by the President on July 1, 1957, and was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations on that day and made public. The committee considered the proposed amendment on July 23, 1957, in executive session. Capt. Robert T. Merrill, Chief of the Shipping Division of the Department of State, and Capt. Robert A. Smyth, of the United States Coast Guard appeared in support of the amendment. No other communications either for or against the proposed amendment have been received by the committee. The committee voted unanimously to report the amendment favorably to the Senate.

BACKGROUND OF THE AMENDMENT

On April 20, 1949, the Senate approved the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea which entered into force on Novem-

ber 19, 1952. Forty-six other countries are also parties to the convention.

The convention sets forth uniform principles and rules for the promotion of maritime safety. The convention provides that amendments to it proposed by any party may be circulated to the others and if unanimously accepted shall become part of the convention. The United Kingdom has proposed this amendment to permit the use on vessels of inflatable liferafts as an alternative to the conventional buoyant apparatus and noninflatable liferafts which are the only types now permitted under the convention. The President, with the concurrence of the Departments of State, Defense, Commerce, and Treasury, has proposed that the United States ratify the proposed amendment. Approximately 30 nations have already agreed to the amendment.

From a technical standpoint there is general agreement that inflatable liferafts have become an acceptable alternative lifesaving device. The International Convention covers only vessels engaged in international carriage and does not apply to naval vessels. Nevertheless, on vessels of the United States Navy balsa-wood floats are already being replaced by inflatable liferafts. Other United States vessels in international carriage may not use inflatable liferafts because the convention now prohibits them.

WHAT THE AMENDMENT DOES

The proposed amendment to the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea simply removes the existing prohibition contained in the convention on the use of inflatable liferafts on vessels. The amendment would not require that vessels covered by the convention substitute inflatable liferafts. Conventional liferafts and other buoyant equipment may still be used. The amendment to the International Convention will have no effect upon and will require no change in United States law. United States shipping authorities may or may not proceed to adopt inflatable liferafts, depending upon the outcome of further tests on the effectiveness of them. If inflatable liferafts are adopted for standard use aboard commercial vessels it is expected that they will be supplementary to conventional lifesaving devices.

The Committee on Foreign Relations urges the continuation of research to improve the launching, storage, weathering, and maintenance characteristics of inflatable liferafts. There is, for example, apparently a distinct need for the perfection of an automatic launching mechanism.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

The Committee on Foreign Relations believes that it is important to amend the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea so that inflatable liferafts can be added to the conventional equipment for making travel by sea safe. The committee recommends that the Senate give its advice and consent to the ratification of the amendment.

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